

death enmity in Thull: organized vengeance and social change in a Kohistani community

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For many years anthropologists accepted Evans-Pritchard's structural-functional analysis of Nuer feuds as conventional wisdom on the subject of organized vengeance (Evans-Pritchard 1940). However, as the vitality of the functional paradigm waned, researchers developed new ways of understanding feuding arrangements, ways that thought of feuding relationships as processes playing out through time (Peters 1967; Turner 1971). Yet functionalist theories of organized vengeance refused to die, appearing reborn in *Cohesive Force* (Black-Michaud 1975) and *Blood Revenge* (Boehm 1984). My purpose here is to argue for a return to the kind of perspective advocated by Peters and Turner, one that not only helps understand how feuds function as parts of ongoing social systems, but just as important, enables us to see organized vengeance in the context of historical transformation.

Cohesive Force and *Blood Revenge* are the most extensive and detailed works dealing with the anthropology of organized vengeance to appear in recent years. Following Evans-Pritchard's lead, Black-Michaud maintained that the primary function of feuds was to promote social cohesion in situations of scarce natural resources and rudimentary political organization. His analysis differed, however, from standard functional explanations in its insistence on the role economic and political self-interest played in feuding behavior, thus melding the kind of transactionalist approach developed by Barth (1959) with classic structural-functionalism. Black-Michaud saw feuds as transactional relationships based on calculated self-interest that are ultimately about "competition for leadership in situations in which egalitarian ideals and a lack of opportunities for economic differentiation prevail" (1975:25-26).

In contrast, Boehm (1984) employed a different kind of functional perspective. While Black-Michaud analyzed feuds in relation to their function in maintaining systems of social relationships, Boehm took an ecological perspective, viewing social institutions or cultural traits in terms of their contribution to the survival or expansion of human populations within given environments. Much of *Blood Revenge* demonstrated how feuding institutions functioned to maintain a constant population in tribal Montenegro during the 19th century, where a mountain environment with scarce natural resources and an external predator in the Turkish Empire made survival problematic.

Although Boehm's model of feuding is consciously evolutionary, employing notions of survival, adaptation, predation, and selection, he deliberately emphasizes that feuding systems are

Anthropologists often view institutionalized vengeance from a synchronic perspective, asking what is the function of blood feuds in maintaining order, strengthening group cohesion, balancing population, and protecting against external political threats. Such a perspective has limited usefulness in understanding blood feuds in Thull, a community in the Hindu-Kush mountains where organized revenge is a recent development. In such communities institutionalized vengeance can best be understood in the context of sociocultural systems in the process of historical transformation. [feuds, sociocultural change, Islam]

not simply the outcome of blind cultural selection. Rather the form feuding institutions take is largely a result of rational choices made by members of societies in dealing with particular problems. The adaptive value of feuding arrangements, therefore, is rooted in conscious social engineering by individuals, based on rationality and calculation.

Calculated self-interest as the basic motivation in feuding behavior is a major point on which Boehm and Black-Michaud agree, and indeed, the assumption that self-interest is the primary motivation in human behavior underlies much of modern political anthropology. Yet the functionalist/transactionalist approach obscures as much as it illuminates, especially as an explanation for systems of organized vengeance. The need for a different perspective is clear when we look at organized vengeance in Thull, a Kohistani tribal community in the mountains of Dir District in northwest Pakistan where I worked in 1984.¹

One cannot live in Thull even for a day without becoming aware of the pervasiveness of organized violence. The array of weaponry itself is astounding—a genuine storehouse of arms. Men own specially made fighting knives, axes, clubs, walking sticks designed to double as stabbing spears, automatic pistols, revolvers, bolt action rifles, updated versions of 19th-century British Army cavalry carbines, and the prize pieces—Kalashnikov AK 47 assault rifles. One even finds bolt action versions of the AK 47, designed and produced by the local cottage arms industry. The sounds of Thull reflect its weaponry. Shots are heard continually during the day and often times in the night as well. Religious authorities have almost succeeded in stamping out singing and drumming; in their place gunfire has become the music of Thull.

When I first arrived in Thull I was surprised to find *mar dushmani* (literally, death enmity—the Kohistani phrase for social relationships of blood vengeance) so endemic. Fredrik Barth, writing about neighboring Swat Kohistan, reported that Kohistani² communities exiled murderers and considered homicide a crime against the community, although at the same time recognized that retaliatory vengeance had some legitimacy (1956:64–65). Because Barth reported that the people of Dir and Swat Kohistan shared the same language and customs (1956:53), I assumed that organized vengeance would not be a central aspect of the social order in Thull. Obviously I was wrong.

Either Barth was unaware of the important differences between Swat and Dir Kohistan, or else the difference between Barth's report and the present situation in Thull is the result of social change. Further research indicated the latter is more likely.³ Informants attested that the nature and extent of violent conflicts have substantially changed in the last 15 years. Previously most fights were between patrilineages. Weapons were limited to those not considered lethal, since murder was considered bad for the peace of the community. Since then, however, the majority of fights have been either between individuals, or between individuals supported by their allies. At present no rules limit the use of weapons; the goal is to kill the enemy in retaliation for some injury. Most recently the number of retaliatory murders and assaults has so increased that the local Pakistani police, well acquainted with violence in rural communities, simply shake their heads in resignation, stating that the people of Thull are among the worst, most lawless in Pakistan.

How can we explain changes in the pattern of organized violence in Thull, and particularly how can we understand the development of death enmity as a centerpiece in Thull social organization? Functional theory cannot provide an answer, nor can perspectives that see the feud primarily in terms of calculation and self-interest. Rather, the answer lies in understanding how emotions relate to the construction of self, how such relationships develop in the context of a particular sociocultural system, and how historical transformations in sociocultural systems redefine emotional systems and effect changes in definitions of self.

The importance of emotions in organized vengeance is powerfully expressed in *Land Without Justice* (1958), Milhovan Djilas' autobiography of his childhood in Montenegro, a time when blood feuding pervaded the lives of its people.

Revenge is an overpowering and consuming fire. It flares up and burns away every other thought and emotion. Only it remains, over and above everything else. . . . Vengeance—this is a breath of life one shares from the cradle with one's fellow clansmen, in both good fortune and bad, vengeance from eternity. . . . It was our clan, and Uncle Mirko—his love and suffering and the years of unfulfilled desire for revenge and for life. Vengeance is not hatred, but the wildest and sweetest kind of drunkenness, both for those who must wreak vengeance and for those who wish to be avenged [1958:106–107].

Djilas' exegesis suggests that in Montenegro organized violence might best be understood in relation to culturally specific configurations of emotions, themselves elements of symbolic universes that give meaning to human actions. Revenge in Montenegro is perhaps as much a culturally defined emotion as it is an action. Djilas shows us how feeling revenge helps Montenegrins define themselves as particular kinds of people, as well as explain to themselves how their actions and the actions of their neighbors make sense in the context of a particular cultural universe.⁴

That emotions are elements of a symbolic universe, pieces of culture, if you will, that frame human interaction is also developed in almost overwhelming detail by the social psychologist James Averill in his book *Anger and Aggression: An Essay on Emotion* (1982). It is impossible to adequately summarize all the salient points in Averill's constructivist theory of emotions; rather I will concentrate here on those parts of his argument particularly important for understanding organized vengeance.

The essence of Averill's position is that emotions are socially constituted, that is to say, culturally defined. In other words, emotions are cultural constructs, important parts of systems of meaning in terms of which people structure, organize, and understand their world. As constructs, emotions consist of culturally defined feelings (things that people experience), as well as culturally recognized ways of acting that manifest feelings. Moreover, emotions are produced in response to occurrences themselves culturally delineated by the emotions they call forth. Thus a grammar of emotions exists, made up of ordered combinations of feelings manifested in behavior and cued by particular occurrences (1982:2–22).

The idea that emotions are grammatically organized cultural constructs has several implications. First, as grammars of speech are language-specific, so grammars of emotions are culture-specific. Therefore, we cannot assume that any particular emotions are culturally universal. Rather, what emotions exist and how they are conceptually and behaviorally organized must be determined for each cultural system. Second, emotion systems exhibit grammatical rules that make emotional experiences meaningful. These rules are not narrowly deterministic, but allow for a great deal of negotiation and improvisation (1982:22).

Averill identifies several classes of grammatical rules ordering emotion systems. Only one, rules of attribution, need concern us here. Rules of attribution affect the way emotional responses are connected to the self—as actions or passions. The distinction is between the active self making choices in terms of rational calculation and the passive self compelled to behave/feel in culturally prescribed ways. Whether an emotional response is experienced as a passion or an action depends on how that response is related to the self. If behaving/feeling in terms of an emotion is defined as central to people's very being, then they cannot help responding in the culturally prescribed way—at least if they are to maintain their sense of self. In such instances people will experience the emotion as a passion, something that happens to them and, therefore, over which they have little control (1982:22). Of course, both actions and passions are contained within most emotion systems, but the interconnection between them and the relevance of each varies among cultural systems.

In the view of most students of the blood feud, the act of taking vengeance is distinct from the feeling state (anger, hatred, or political calculation) that motivates it. Constructivist theory, however, leads us to look at vengeance in different ways. First, because anger and hatred are our own cultural constructs, we cannot assume they are universal emotions, and, therefore, necessarily involved in vengeance in every society practicing the blood feud. Thus, for example, from Djilas' narration quoted above, it appears that the emotion relevant to blood feuds in

Montenegro is neither anger nor hatred but vengeance itself. Further, Djilas' description of vengeance as a kind of wild sweet drunkenness is clearly quite different from the way most Westerners would describe either anger or hatred. Second, constructivist theory leads us to see vengeance emotions as systems composed of both feelings and behavior systematically inter-related. And finally, the constructivist approach leads us to look at how vengeance is experienced, both as actions involving choices made in terms of cost/benefit calculations, and as passions—responses so definitive of the sense of self that particular behavior is compelled by cultural rules.

A constructivist approach, unlike functionalist theory, lends itself especially well to the study of sociocultural change. The functionalists, whether Black-Michaud or Boehm, asked essentially the same question: what is the *consequence* of systems of organized revenge on other aspects of life? This was undoubtedly an important question. Yet the functionalist point of view is limited in its ability to explain organized vengeance in changing societies like Thull by the very foundation of functionalist theory—its synchronic perspective. Thus, for example, Black-Michaud thinks of leadership patterns, forms of social organization, and values as entities interconnected by the institution of the feud to form coherent wholes. The feud, then, defines a particular kind of social system. As long as it exists as a timeless institution, the society exists as a timeless reality. Obviously such a perspective cannot explain vengeance in Thull because it ignores change. Similarly, Boehm's explanation of the feud ignores change in that it explains feuding arrangements as mechanisms to maintain a stable population in a given sociophysical environment. To understand *dushmani* in Thull, we must ask a different question: How are systems of organized vengeance generated? Of course the answer to this question will be complex, involving historical, social structural, and cultural transitions, but the constructivist approach focuses attention on a key variable. We have seen how the behavioral response element in emotion systems is related to cultural definitions of the sense of self. Accordingly, to understand how *dushmani* was generated in Thull we must look at how cultural definitions of self changed, and in changing affected the configuration of passions and actions comprising vengeance emotions. But as elements of culture, emotion systems are parts of wider cultural systems that are given life in the give and take of social interaction. Consequently it is important to view changes in emotion systems as parts of wider social and cultural transitions.

I should emphasize that such a perspective does not abandon the notion of system so important to the functionalist perspective. Organized vengeance is an integral part of a system, but a system quite different from an organism whose parts interact to maintain it in a steady state, or a structure whose pattern is determined by its adaptation to a particular ecological niche. Rather its systemic qualities are analogous to a weather system—structurally ordered to be sure, but dynamic as well: a system ever in flux whose interrelated parts are as much processes as forms (Hallpike 1977:275–277). Understanding organized vengeance in Thull involves understanding how it relates to forms of ecological adaptation, principles of social organization, cultural beliefs and values, social rules, and most importantly, culturally defined emotions. For these entities not only comprise the milieu within which vengeance is carried out, but also are forces that influence its pattern. Yet at the same time, the forces themselves are in the process of change, and in changing influence the pattern itself. Death enmity in Thull is like the eye of a hurricane: it lies at the center of a system, it stands in dynamic relationship with the entities encapsulating it, and it formed historically as the result of the complex interplay of other forms and processes. *Dushmani*, in other words, is to be understood in part as an historical process—its contemporary structure to be seen as resulting from a long series of socio-cultural transformations. Accordingly, our analysis must begin with history, since it is only by understanding how Thull society and culture developed that we can see how death enmity was born.

Thull, a community of roughly 6000 people, is located in the uppermost reaches of the Panjkora valley. It is the most remote community in Dir Kohistan. Dir District, of which Dir Kohistan is a part, is bounded by Chitral in the north, Swat in the west, Afghanistan and Bajour in the east, and Malakand in the south. Like its eastern neighbor Swat, Dir is dominated by Yusufzai Pakhtuns who, forcing their way through the Malakand Pass, occupied the lower Dir and Swat valleys in the 16th century. At the time of the Yusufzai invasions the northern, most remote valleys of Dir and Swat were sparsely inhabited by Indo-Aryan-speaking pagan tribes culturally related to the non-Pakhtun inhabitants of the mountains to the north and west of Dir in what are now Chitral and Afghanistan.

In the absence of historical records, cultural reconstructions are always fraught with difficulty. Fortunately, a wealth of information exists on pagan culture in mountain areas close to Dir Kohistan,⁵ which, along with local stories, traditions, and current ethnography, allows us to sketch out the general outline of pagan society and culture in Thull. The reconstruction is speculative, to be sure, but it does agree with what we know of the ethnography and history of the area.

Local traditions hint at the general political unrest endemic in Kohistan during the time prior to the Yusufzai invasions. To protect against raiders seeking plunder and avaricious neighbors seeking land and animals, settlements were scattered high in the mountains in inaccessible hollows, ravines, ridges, and small plateaus, the occasional remains of which can still be seen today. Each community was responsible for its own defense, but formed political alliances with neighbors for mutual protection. The mountain villages on either side of the valley above present-day Thull signaled impending danger with smoke signals and joined to fight off approaching attackers.

Social organization during the pre-Islamic period centered on the exchange of women among exogamous lineages. Leadership institutions probably reflected the general insecurity in the region. Leaders were drawn from lineage elders chosen ad hoc for the specific problem at hand. The maintenance of village peace through the nonviolent resolution of internal disputes was one of their most important tasks, since factionalism dangerously weakened the community's ability to deal effectively with external threats. Because the sexual purity of women was generally considered unimportant, relationships between the sexes were relatively open, and women were not secluded. Discreet sexual encounters between nonmarried partners were thought to be relatively innocent, and even when extramarital liaisons became public, they were never a legitimate reason for murder. This is not to say that disputes over women were not politically volatile. In fact, as Darling's study of the pagan Kalash (1971), and Nuristani's data on the recently converted Kalasha (n.d.) show, wife-stealing was a major source of political conflict within pagan communities. Wife-stealing, though an attack on a husband's rights, did not require homicidal retaliation in order for a man to maintain his sense of self. Therefore, it was usually possible to settle such cases peacefully through the payment of fines and compensation. Moreover, wife-stealing struck at important political alliances between lineages built on ties of marriage. In order to maintain these alliances, agnates of both opponents in such disputes generally applied pressure for their peaceful settlement.

Self in pagan culture depended on achieving rank in a complex system of hierarchically structured statuses. Rank was marked by the right to display certain symbols and by the respect given a person in particular ritual and political situations. Rank was achieved in two ways: first, by sponsoring elaborate feasts of merit in which large quantities of wealth were expended; and second, by killing specified numbers of the community's enemies. Both of these generally required the cooperation of others, and a man unwilling to obey the cultural rules against taking vengeance would not be given the support necessary to become a man of rank (Nuristani n.d.).

In pagan communities rules against taking vengeance were as central to the social order as the value of maintaining village peace was to the cultural system. For example, among the Kalasha tribe located across the border in Afghanistan, village harmony was considered so important that disputants were forcefully urged to settle their differences without violence. Immediate retaliation for murder was permitted though disapproved, and honor was given to those who accepted compensation in lieu of taking revenge. In fact village peace was so strongly valued that whenever a dispute threatened to escalate to violence, onlookers forcibly separated disputants and mediators were brought in to facilitate a rapprochement. This effectively minimized the potential for violence and physical retaliation in social relationships. In rare instances when murder did occur, immediate and intense pressure to settle the matter without further bloodshed was brought to bear on the opposing parties. Usually such efforts were successful, since individuals refusing to accept a fair settlement risked losing support from their kinsmen and could even be forcibly expelled from the community (Nuristani n.d.). Similar customs reported by Barth for Swat Kohistan make it probable that murder and revenge were treated in a like manner during the pre-Islamic period in Dir. Even in present day Thull *lamo aman* (village peace) is an important value, and to be called *aman pasand* (peace lover) a highly valued compliment. Lineage elders still negotiate dispute settlements, though their efforts in murder cases are most often fruitless.

Although the blood feud as an institution organizing social relationships within pagan communities did not exist, the legitimacy of certain kinds of retaliatory vengeance murders was recognized during pagan times. Among the pagan Kom, extended series of retaliatory vengeance killings were common, but were directed outside the community to other surrounding tribes. For example, raids on Pakhtun villages were mounted in revenge for the killing of a Kom culture hero (Strand, personal communication), and, as we have seen, killing enemies in these raids was one way to achieve important status in the community. Today *dushmani* sometimes, though rarely, exists between Kohistani communities as well as between individuals. Kalkot and Birikot have had a relationship of enmity for the last 15 years; as a result 15 men have lost their lives.

In all probability, then, organized vengeance was a part of the social order in pre-Islamic Kohistan—though not related to honor based on sexual purity of women, and limited to intercommunity relations. Intracommunity peace was critical for survival in an environment where force often decided political differences between settlements. Networks of alliance and hostility among communities cast in terms of organized vengeance provided a degree of order in an otherwise anarchical situation.

Even though one can argue that the rules that directed vengeance outside the community had adaptive value in the political context of the times, this in itself is not a satisfactory explanation for why homicidal vengeance within pagan communities was so rare. Among the Kalash today taking vengeance happens infrequently, if ever. Yet the Pakistani government has effectively eradicated intercommunity warfare. In contrast, among Pakhtun communities in neighboring Afghanistan, institutionalized vengeance remains at the core of the sociocultural system. Yet these communities are facing extinction by the armed forces of the Soviet Union.

A better explanation for why vengeance was so rare in pre-Islamic Kohistani communities is that the organization of pagan society and culture made taking vengeance so disadvantageous. Just as important, however, pagan societies constructed self such that the kinds of emotions aroused by disputes did not include homicidal revenge. Thus among the Kalash, when a man's wife became another's lover, the husband often demonstrated anger, publicly slandering his rival with verbal insults and even physically attacking his rival if the occasion presented itself. But the intent was never to kill. Emotions usually subsided after a relatively short time, especially when the husband was paid the proper indemnity, normally twice the original brideprice (Darling 1971:49–50). In contrast, accepting such an indemnity would be unthinkable in Kohistani communities today. Incidents like these require an instant exchange of gunfire. The pas-

sion for revenge aroused in the cuckolded husband demands that he at least attempt to kill his wife's lover. As we shall see, contemporary Kohistani communities construct self in ways that sharply contrast with those of the pre-Islamic period.

In the last half of the 15th century occurrences in the faraway Kabul valley set in motion events that had profound effects on Kohistani culture. During the reign of Ulugh Beg, Timur's grandson, the Khakhai tribe of Pakhtuns was one of the most politically powerful groups inhabiting the Kabul valley. Tensions between the unruly Khakhai and Ulugh Beg grew to the point of open conflict, and following a feast at which the majority of Khakhai leaders were treacherously murdered, the tribe fled the valley. So began a long series of migrations that in the next century led to the conquest of lower Dir and Swat by the Yusufzai, a subdivision of the Khakhai. By 1550 they had extended their control over the most fertile sections of both valleys.

Although not successful in subjugating the pagan tribes in their inaccessible mountain retreats, nevertheless the Yusufzai conquests brought about far-reaching changes. The disruption of population following the wars of conquest affected the composition of local groups. The high remote valleys of both Dir and Swat became areas of refuge. New communities formed as Muslim refugees from lower Dir and Swat mingled with, and sometimes displaced, older populations. Accompanying the refugees came Pakhtun missionaries who penetrated the most remote regions, converted the majority of people to Islam, and established themselves as religious authorities in the newly formed communities, events that occurred in Thull in about 1580.

The cultural values, concepts, and ideas so important to organized vengeance in contemporary Thull were probably introduced at this time. Their effect on existing social organization and culture resulted in a new, unique Kohistani sociocultural system—a system, however, neither logically consistent nor tightly structured. Rather it was a changing field of tensions and contradictions exerting forces of varying strength on different individuals at different times.

During the next three centuries constantly shifting political alliances and oppositions typified political relations in the region. Predatory attacks and counterattacks marked relationships between the communities in Kohistan and the emerging states in neighboring valleys. Raiders in Kohistan plundered villages in Yasin, Chitral, and Dir, while Kohistani settlements were in turn subject to raids, attacks, and small-scale invasions. In spite of continual attempts at conquest the Kohistanis maintained their independence, although sometimes forced to pay tribute to one or another of the neighboring states.

It seems likely that even after conversion to Islam the core of Kohistani social organization and culture remained generally unchanged. Barth reports that as late as 1954 the seclusion of women was not a feature of Kohistani life in Swat, and relationships between men and women were free and open (1956:66). Similarly, informants in Thull stated that rules of strict *purdah* now in force are relatively recent—in fact occurring only in the last ten years. With respect to marriage rules Barth's informants stated no preference for any category of spouse, and in particular no preference for marriage with close agnates (1956:66). While this unquestionably represents a change from the strict lineage exogamy of the pagan period, it is still quite different from the claims of strict FBD marriage one hears today.

Politics within Kohistani communities probably remained unchanged as well. As we have seen, Barth's data on Kohistani politics shows a system similar in form to the pagan Kalash and recently converted Nuristani. In the unstable conditions that continued in the area after conversion the political unity of communities was crucial for their survival, and organized vengeance within communities was probably too threatening to be permitted.⁶ Yet forces of sociocultural change set in motion by contact with Pakhtun culture and conversion to Islam were to have an increasing impact on patterns of organized vengeance as events in the outside world continued to modify the political milieu in which the Kohistani communities existed.

In the mid-19th century southern Dir was under the nominal control of one Ghasam Khan, known locally as the Khan of Dir. Ghasam Khan, along with a number of other local Pakhtun leaders in Dir, Swat, and neighboring Bajour, were continually struggling among themselves

for hegemony in the area. Alliances and oppositions shifted as ambitious men sought to further their aspirations at the expense of rivals. In 1849, with the formal establishment of British rule in the plains of Malakand, a new player entered the game. Now, however, the struggles for supremacy among the local Khans of the area became one small play in a larger contest—the “great game” between the British and Russians.

The British were concerned with events in Dir, Swat, and Bajour for two reasons—to insure trade and commerce in the Empire and to protect India's northwest frontier from Russia. The Peshawar valley, of which the plains of Malakand were a part, was an area rich in agriculture, and as such a profitable addition to the holdings of the British East India Company. At least a degree of tranquility was necessary in Malakand if trade and commerce were to flourish. The politically unsettled conditions in the mountain valleys above the Malakand Pass constantly threatened to spill onto the plains, thereby disrupting peace and threatening profits. To check this threat, the British punished raids on her territory and disrespect for her authority by mounting punitive expeditions.⁷

As the Russian Empire expanded in Central Asia to the northwest of India, tensions between England and Russia mounted, and the protection of India's northwest border became an obsession with the British government. To this end the British incorporated into their sphere of influence first Kashmir, then Gilgit, and finally Chitral; to protect their influence in Chitral, they were drawn into active participation in the affairs of Dir. Initially, a hands-off policy was adopted, allowing local events in Dir, Swat, and Bajour to run their course with only minimal interference. Later, however, British officials actively encouraged the establishment of states whose rulers they could control. This policy ultimately led to the incorporation of Dir Kohistan into the state of Dir, an event that in turn effected changes in patterns of organized violence in Thull.

the incorporation of Thull

In 1877 a figure appeared in Bajour that made a lasting impression on political alignments in the Northwest Frontier. Umra Khan was the second son of Aman Khan, a leading political figure in the Jandol valley in western Bajour. Through connivance, intrigue, murder, and warfare, Umra Khan first gained control of the Jandol valley and then drove the Khan of Dir into exile in Swat, adding Dir to his possessions. Casting his eyes on the rich forests of Kohistan, he attacked the Kohistani communities in the upper Panjkora valley in about 1891. According to local traditions the Kohistanis of Dir were aided by their brethren in Swat, but armed with slings and ancient matchlocks they could not stand before the modern rifles of Umra Khan's forces—rifles purchased with British consent in India. From that time forward Thull and the other villages of Dir Kohistan were part of Dir State.⁸

Umra Khan next began a series of intrigues in the affairs of Chitral that ultimately led to his final downfall. In 1895 he invaded Chitral with the purpose of installing his ally Sher Afsal as ruler. This led to the siege of the British mission in Chitral Fort, and the dispatch of the Chitral Relief Force from Mardan. During the march to Chitral, Muhammad Sharif Khan, the exiled Khan of Dir since his father's death, offered his assistance to the British with an eye toward regaining his position in Dir. His offer was accepted and he provided valuable help in securing passage for British forces through the Panjkora valley. When Jandol fell to elements of the Relief Force, Umra Khan recognized the inevitable and fled to Afghanistan.

In the aftermath of the Chitral campaign the British resolved to strengthen their position in the Northwest Frontier by stationing a permanent garrison in Chitral. Agreements were drawn with Sharif Khan obligating him to maintain a postal road in the Panjkora valley linking Chitral with Malakand. In addition he agreed to protect telegraph lines, to keep campgrounds along the road in good order, and to allow the annual change of the Chitral garrison to pass freely

through his territory. In return he received a considerable annual subsidy and the title "Nawab." The British Government established a permanent garrison at Chakdarra, across the southern border of Dir, and instituted a political agency for Dir, Swat, and Chitral.

Throughout the remaining days of the British Raj the maintenance of a friendly government in Dir strong enough to protect the road to Chitral was a cornerstone of British colonial policy in the Northwest Frontier. As long as the Nawab protected the road and allowed the British Army to use it, the Raj was satisfied. To this end the Government provided the Nawab arms, subsidies, specially arranged meetings with the Viceroy in Simla, and almost complete *carte blanche* to rule as he saw fit. For the next 60 years, until Dir was abolished as a state by the Pakistani government, the communities of Dir Kohistan were subject to the Nawab's whims.

Sharif Khan built his political policy on twin pillars: loyalty to the British Raj, and a tenacious adherence to traditional Pakhtun values. Unlike the ruler of neighboring Swat who pursued a policy of social and economic development, Sharif Khan strove to maintain Dir as a classic Weberian patrimonial state. Toward this end he neither adopted nor developed any kind of formal legal code to regularize his rule, governing instead by arbitrary decrees determined at whim. Further, the Nawab constructed few roads in Dir State, with, of course, the exception of the road linking Dir and Chitral built at the insistence of the British. Thus the Kohistani communities remained physically isolated and at least partially quarantined from political, intellectual, and economic developments outside Dir. Finally, in order to weaken potential opposition, the Nawab actively encouraged local strife and, following the demands of his British patrons, suppressed armed conflicts between the communities of Dir and Chitral.

The Nawab's policies effected particular cultural changes in Thull. In order to promote local strife, thereby weakening opposition to his rule, Sharif Khan encouraged *dushmani* by levying light fines for murder while at the same time advocating that injured parties retaliate rather than accept compensation. This policy was instituted under the guise of promoting *badal* (revenge), a key value in *pakhtunwali*, the code of the Pakhtuns. For a number of reasons, however, institutionalized vengeance did not become an important element in social relations at this time, even though *badal* was recognized as an important value. First, *badal* contradicted the value of *aman pasand* (village peace) that acted as a counteracting force. In addition, it contradicted the ways prestige and leadership operated. Leadership in Thull was based on possessing *aizzat* (prestige), which, among other things, depended on having relatively good relationships with other men in the community. Peacefully settling one's disputes helped maintain good relations. But *badal* required violent retaliation and, if continually followed, could result in animosity, thereby lessening an individual's prestige and weakening his ability to achieve leadership. Further, leaders were chosen by members of their patrilineage to represent the interests of the lineage. People suspected that a man generally unwilling to forgo personal revenge might not be particularly concerned with group interests. Thus the power of personal vengeance was tempered by countervailing forces compelling men to make peace. Although *badal* became a value firmly entrenched in Kohistani culture, it was but one of many often contradictory forces, explaining in part why it did not lead to the widespread adoption of blood vengeance (*dushmani*).

This configuration of moral values was not the only force inhibiting the development of *dushmani* during the Nawab's reign. Intercommunity political relationships, ecology, social organization, and the Nawab's refusal to build roads were also relevant factors. During the Nawab's rule, subsistence in Thull was based on a balance between alpine herding and agriculture. In the winter goats and cattle were kept in special quarters in or near permanent settlements, while in the summer owners took their herds into the mountains to graze on the rich grass found in high alpine meadows. Herding was generally the work of men, while women cultivated maize in the fields surrounding the permanent settlements. Although both cultivation and herding were necessary for subsistence, herding also provided cash income. During the summer cheese

and ghee produced in the mountains were transported by foot to surrounding market centers for sale.

Herdin was a chancy operation at best. Disease, accidents, and sudden changes in weather, common in the high mountains, often decimated herds. Earlier, raiding the communities in Chitral had been the commonest way to recoup animal losses. However, following the incorporation of Thull into Dir State, large-scale raids in Chitral became uneconomical, because the Nawab, at the insistence of the British, harshly punished raids in Chitrali territory. As a result conflicts within the community significantly increased. As strife turned inward, disputes over stray animals and arguments about animal theft became common.

Yet even though the Nawab's policy of playing off opponents exacerbated such disputes, *dushmani* did not develop as one might expect. The reason for this lies partly in the nature of descent group organization and the distribution of rights to pasture. In brief, Thull was divided into three patrilineal clans, each in turn divided into various lineages. In the Nawab's time clans had important ceremonial functions (no longer operant), and often opposed one another in political contexts. When disputes broke out between lineages of different clans, other lineages often became involved through ties of common clanship. Hence the potential existed for disputes between lineages to grow so that large numbers of people were involved, and, on occasion, physical fights broke out between clans, pitting a majority of males in the community against one another.

Rules allocating access to pastures, however, reduced the acrimony of disputes. Summer pastures in Thull were divided into units, each with a particular name and clearly demarcated boundaries. Such pasture units were allocated by annual lottery for a one-year period to groups called *lud*. While lineages were the basic units in *lud*, each *lud* was composed of lineages from all three clans. Thus people who herded together, who had common rights to pastures and common interest in protecting these rights, were often the very people who opposed one another in clan disputes. In this classic system of conflicting allegiances political interests and moral sentiments crosscut one another, as men opposed in certain contexts joined together in others. Settling disputes without violence not only upheld the value of village peace, but also allowed Kohistanis to avoid painful political choices between *lud* and clan allies. Despite an increase in intracommunity contention, then, mechanisms of dispute settlement operated more or less successfully because both a moral value and a political interest existed for doing so.

The Nawab's refusal to build roads, another factor important in inhibiting the development of *dushmani*, had two consequences. First, it physically isolated the Kohistani communities. Thull and her neighbors are located in a high mountain valley, which, during the Nawab's rule, was linked to the rest of Dir by narrow, treacherous footpaths. Communication was difficult in the best of weather and impossible when snow and mudslides blocked the mountain tracks. As a result, the Nawab's representatives could visit Kohistan only in the summer, which left power in local affairs in the institutions of the indigenous political system. Public assemblies continued to make political decisions and lineage leaders continued to mediate disputes, at least publicly, in terms of local custom and morality. In spite of the incorporation of Thull into Dir State, its institutions for dispute settlement thus remained largely intact.

Even more important, the lack of roads limited economic development, which in turn limited the amount of cash individuals could accumulate. As a result few Kohistanis could purchase rifles. During the Nawab's rule the most common weapons in Kohistan were clubs, knives, stabbing spears, and slings. It was difficult to kill with these weapons because their effective use demanded close proximity to the intended victim, at best a difficult task to accomplish. Therefore, in many instances disputes that escalated to violence did not result in murder. These disputes were easier than murder cases to settle peacefully because they did not arouse such violent emotions. Even in cases involving murder, people were often (though not always) willing to accept compensation after feelings had cooled, because retaliatory killing was so difficult to successfully carry out.

Finally, even though parts of Kohistani culture changed radically following conversion to Islam, cultural ideas regarding women remained generally unchanged. As late as the period of the Nawab's rule the sexual purity of women was relatively unimportant. Women were not required to observe *purdah* in order to protect the honor of their male kin, and relations between the sexes were relatively free. Not surprisingly, vengeance was considered culturally inappropriate in conflicts over women; such conflicts were not the occasion for passions requiring homicidal retaliation. As a result the possibility for relationships of death enmity to develop in intracommunity social relations was minimized.

During the Nawab's rule internal conflict and tension came to permeate Thull politics. Yet because of social institutions, cultural values, and particular features of the larger system of which Thull was a part, institutionalized vengeance did not pervade social relationships. At the same time the value of *badal* became an accepted part of Kohistani culture, and intracommunity strife an expected part of personal relations. Thus, for the first time beliefs in the legitimacy of blood feuding became a part of Kohistani culture even though the incidence of death enmity remained relatively small.

the contemporary period

Following independence in 1947, the newly created government of Pakistan assumed control of the Northwest Frontier Province, although internal affairs in Dir remained under the direct control of the Nawab. When tension developed between the Nawab and Pakistani officials over his opposition to social and economic development, the Nawab was forcibly deposed, and in 1965 the government assumed direct administration of Dir.

After the Nawab's fall a new era in Dir began, an era marked by far-reaching change. The Pakistani Government immediately embarked on an ambitious program of social and economic development. A large, relatively modern hospital complex was built in Timargara, Dir's administrative center; schools, administrative offices, medical clinics, and police posts were constructed in all parts of the district including the most remote mountain regions; and the construction of a road system was begun, linking hitherto isolated villages with the rest of the country. In Kohistan bus service was initiated after an unpaved road was completed from Thull to Dir town in the main valley. Travel both within and outside Kohistan then became comparatively easy. In the 1970s electricity was installed in the main valley as part of an ongoing rural electrification program, and with the establishment of a national television channel, programs were beamed to Dir.² Telephone lines were strung in many parts of the district reaching in Kohistan as far as Kalkot. And in Thull, like the flu in January, *dushmani* swept through the network of social relationships.

It is the explosion of death enmity in conjunction with social and economic development that makes organized vengeance in Thull such a fascinating study. Why would *dushmani* become focally important in Thull social relations at the same time that the community became politically integrated into a modern state, an educational system was implemented, and programs of economic development instituted? The answer cannot be the need for social cohesion in an anarchical situation, for the Pakistani state abolished anarchy. It cannot be the need to fight external predators, for the Pax Britannica long ago caged predators. And it cannot be the need to maintain a balanced population in a region of scarce land resources, for there is at present enough land for all. Rather the answer lies in understanding how a particular system evolved in the context of changing external conditions.

The construction of a transportation infrastructure linking Thull with the rest of Pakistan was the most important external change to affect *dushmani*. That a highway system would promote organized vengeance seems odd at first, for according to conventional thinking the integration of rural communities into modern developing economic and political systems should lead to

an atrophy of institutions of the feud. Yet just such an integration triggered sociocultural transitions in Thull that ultimately resulted in *dushmani*.

Following construction of the road and the establishment of regular bus service, an ever-increasing number of religious leaders traveled to Mardan and Peshawar to study in centers of Islamic learning with noted Pakhtun scholars and teachers. To call the vision of Islam they brought back to Thull "fundamentalist" is perhaps an oversimplification. In any case, what they brought back completed the transformation of Thull culture from a classic system of marriage alliance based on the exchange of women among exogamous lineages to a system in which concepts of honor, the seclusion of women, and the value of endogamous marriage came to inform social relationships. Changes in the nature of religious beliefs regarding the notion of *iman* was the catalytic agent.

Iman has two distinct but related meanings: "faith," and "gift" (or blessing) from God. As faith *iman* distinguishes muslims from *kafirs*—those who have shown a defiant ingratitude by their refusal to accept God's word and become muslims. *Kafirs* are by definition cruel, immoral human beings. *Iman* as God's "gift" saves muslims from being *kafirs*, and thus from a life of evil and depravity.

Of course, what constitutes *iman* is subject to interpretation and emphasis. However, all muslims interpret *iman* to include the oneness of God and his omnipotence, the existence of special messengers who have brought God's word to humankind at various times, the existence of angels, and the belief in a day of judgment (Martin 1982:16–17). For many muslims, however, *iman* also includes the belief in the sanctity of certain saintly individuals and their power to mediate between God and man.

Before the road to Kohistan was built saint cults were an important part of Islamic beliefs and practices in Thull. However, the belief in saints became heresy following the indoctrination of Kohistani *mullanas* (men who by virtue of learning and piety are recognized as religious authorities) in fundamentalist schools of Islamic theology—schools whose doctrines denied the existence of any humans with special access to God. Armed with fundamentalist theology, Kohistani *mullanas* returned to their communities to begin a campaign against the belief in saints as part of an Islamic purification movement. Today there are no shrines to saints left in Thull, and *mushriks* (believers in saints) are thought to be little more than *kafirs*.

As part of purifying Islam, *mullanas* also preached against music and dancing (especially at weddings), and against the freedom of women from seclusion. The issue of secluding women was especially important for the development of *dushmani*, couched as it was in the context of the Pakhtun notion of *ghairat*. Once the road linked Thull to Islamic centers of learning *ghairat* soon replaced the belief in saints as part of *iman*. Today it is considered the most important aspect of Islamic faith.

Ghairat is clearly connected to *badal* (taking revenge), and when the *ghairat* code became intertwined with faith, revenge emotions became fundamental to maintaining self. To understand why this was so we must understand the meaning of *ghairat* in depth, and this necessitates first understanding the relation between *ghairat* and *aizzat* (*izzat* in Pushto). Both *ghairat* and *aizzat* are often translated "honor," but in Kohistani thinking these are distinct notions. *Ghairat* is perhaps best understood as honor in the sense of personal worth or integrity. As Kohistanis explain, *ghairat* is natural, a part of *iman*, and therefore a gift from God (in fact God's most valuable gift). Every muslim is born with *ghairat*, and although it can be polluted by the actions of others, as one's shoe is polluted by stepping in manure, it can only be lost by the failure of its owner to protect it.

Protecting *ghairat* depends on following a clearly defined code of conduct. One must provide wives and daughters with appropriate food and clothing to the degree one's wealth allows; one must never permit wives and daughters to speak to men not closely related; one must never eat or exchange friendly conversation with the enemy of a close agnate; and one must always be ready to strike out at those who sully one's *ghairat*. If other men stare at a wife or daughter,

reflect light from a snuff box mirror on a wife or daughter, propose intimacy with a wife or daughter, look through a camera at a wife or daughter, flee or attempt to flee the community with a wife or daughter, or have illicit sexual relations with a wife or daughter, the husband's or father's *ghairat* is sullied. The murder of a close agnate, verbal abuse, theft, and assault also pollute *ghairat* and demand vengeance.

Azzat is best translated as honor in the sense of prestige. In contrast to *ghairat* it is artificial, since it is awarded individuals by the community, rather than given by God. *Azzat* depends on personal accomplishments; it fluctuates with an individual's fortune. *Azzat* is measured by the *adab* (respect) accorded by others. Wealth, education, piety, elected position all merit respect and thus confer *azzat*. While a *baghairatman* (one without *ghairat*) would not be given the respect necessary for *azzat*, losing *azzat* does not affect *ghairat*. For example, if a person loses his elected position or his wealth he loses *azzat*, though his *ghairat* remains unaffected.

In Pitt-Rivers' terms the contrast between *azzat* and *ghairat* is the contrast between political and moral honor (1977:79). *Azzat* is political, and thus primarily the concern of those actively involved in the competition for power. Although many people are concerned to some degree with *azzat*, it is of vital concern only to a minority, those with political or social ambitions. *Ghairat*, however, is moral, a quality definitive of self for all men in Thull, and relevant, potentially at least, to the majority of male social relations. Homicidal revenge is always called for in response to the pollution of *ghairat*; thus, it too is potentially relevant to behavior in a wide range of social situations.

The ideological connection between *ghairat* and *iman* deserves further comment. For centuries Kohistani constructions of self have been rooted in Islam, and today the most important part of a man's identity is his status as a muslim. Thus men often cast aspersions on their opponents in terms of the muslim/kafir distinction, each accusing the other of *kafir kar karant* (literally, making *kafir* work, that is, acting like a *kafir*). Such accusations are dangerous, however, because they often lead to violence. Islam is critical in the construction of self, and attacks on one's identity as a muslim call forth such strong emotions that physical violence and even murder can result. For example, during Ramazan, the muslim month of fasting, accusations of breaking the fast have on occasion led to serious injury and loss of life. Kohistanis believe *ghairat* to be one of the most significant elements of Islamic faith, and its defense a sacred obligation. Because it strikes at the very core of a person's sense of self, any act considered an attack on *ghairat* arouses particularly strong passions usually expressed through violent retaliatory actions.

It is understandable, then, why the change to a *ghairat*-centered value system and especially the linking of *ghairat* with *iman* resulted in an epidemic of death enmity. Because *ghairat* was so dependent on female sexual purity, men's sense of self became vulnerable to the way other men behaved towards their women—a vulnerability expanded by the wide range of actions culturally defined as polluting *ghairat*. A glance, a word, a chance reflection of light all had potentially devastating effects on relations between men, since all could be interpreted as attacks on *ghairat*, and all had the power to arouse strong passions for revenge. Further, the rules defining the kind of retribution demanded by *ghairat* for different kinds of attacks significantly increased the potential for homicidal violence. While assault, theft, and even murder of an agnate theoretically at least could be settled with compensation—leaving one's sense of self intact—acts that attacked *ghairat* through women could only be answered with bullets.

Ghairat, therefore, demanded that a man constantly be vigilant and always ready to kill to protect his sense of self. At the same time those who may have either inadvertently or purposefully acted in ways interpretable as polluting another's *ghairat* found themselves in situations demanding constant vigilance if they were to stay alive. As a result, *ghairat* created a sea of potential enemies and placed each man squarely in the middle. Is it not surprising that tension became so pervasive in male social relationships and acid indigestion a common medical complaint. Although the value of keeping village peace continued to be evoked in disputes, when

counterposed to the violent passions aroused by the *ghairat* code and sanctified by *iman*, its power to effect settlements was minimal.

Ghairat not only encouraged *dushmani*, but the rules defining what constituted attacks on *ghairat* created linked sequences of reciprocal murders. For example, if a man killed another for shining a light on his wife, the killing not only cleansed his *ghairat* but just as significantly polluted the *ghairat* of the murdered man's close agnates, requiring them to kill him in return. As a result, relationships of *dushmani* developed both easily and often, were difficult to end, and were punctuated by instances of serial, retaliatory murders. In full force the blood feud had come to Thull.

The construction of the road effected economic transitions within Thull that also contributed to the growth of *dushmani*. The road made cultivating potatoes (which grow particularly well at high elevations) economically viable as a cash crop, for it allowed relatively rapid and inexpensive trucking of produce to market centers throughout Pakistan. Further, it permitted more land to be brought under cultivation. Prior to the existence of the road the number of livestock in the community limited the amount of land that could be cultivated because manure from the animals was the sole source of fertilizer (Barth 1956:55). Following the construction of the road it became possible to import artificial fertilizer, thereby reducing dependence on animals for manure. As a result, the economic base in Thull shifted from a system balanced between herding and cultivation to one weighted in favor of the cultivation of potatoes as a cash crop—a transition manifested by a number of changes. First, the proportion of men actively engaged in herding significantly decreased. Although at present many families keep four or five goats and a few head of cattle, for at least half the adult male population herding is no longer the primary source of cash income. A significant minority own only a few goats, though everyone owns more than enough land for subsistence requirements. Further, as herding decreased in economic importance, an increased proportion of land came under cultivation as men—freed from dependence on natural fertilizer—converted privately owned early spring pastures to more financially lucrative potato fields. Finally, even among those continuing to maintain relatively large herds, few remained active in summer herding, preferring instead to hire shepherds from outside the community.

These changes nurtured *dushmani* in two ways. As the proportion of men actively involved in herding diminished, cross-clan ties created by the *lud* system of pasture distribution shriveled as well. During the Nawab's reign, and before the road was constructed, such ties were an integral component of conflicting allegiances and a potent force in peacefully settling disputes. After the Nawab was removed from power and the road built, the lottery system of pasture distribution continued virtually unchanged. However, it no longer had the same consequence for dispute settlement, since maintaining good relations with members of one's *lud* became less important for the large proportion of men no longer involved in herding activities. As cross-cutting ties lost their potency in maintaining peaceful relations, *dushmani* began to flourish.

The change to an economic system based on the cultivation of potatoes as a cash crop, coupled with an increase in land under cultivation, significantly increased wealth, a factor especially important for the growth of *dushmani*. Wealth in the community increased even further following the development of large-scale timber operations for which the government had originally constructed the road. Not only did timber contractors hire local men as wage laborers, but the government paid an annual royalty to the community as a whole. In 1984 timber royalties alone came to a sum of Rs.15000 (about \$1000) per family.

With increase in wealth came an explosion in the number of firearms owned by members of the community; even poor men were able to buy guns. Bogart's quip in *The Big Sleep*, "Such a lot of guns around town and so few brains," though perhaps a bit ethnocentric when applied to Thull, nevertheless seems appropriate. With guns purchased with earnings from potatoes and royalties from timber it was relatively easy to kill, and men acting out emotions framed by

ghairat and sanctified by *iman* turned newly purchased rifles on their neighbors in a gluttony of death enmity.

conclusion

Anthropologists often treat systems of institutionalized vengeance from a synchronic perspective, asking how vengeance functions in maintaining order, strengthening group cohesion, balancing population, and protecting against external political threats. Such a perspective generally sees the feud as an institution critical to the operation of archaic tribal social organization in situations where scarce natural resources and political anarchy make social life problematic. However, this perspective has limited usefulness in understanding institutionalized vengeance in Thull because there is no scarcity of natural resources, no political anarchy necessitating cohesion, and no predator society threatening the community's existence from without. *Dushmani*, significantly, is of recent development, occurring within an historical context shaped by economic change and political modernization. Consequently this paper did not analyze *dushmani* in terms of its contribution to maintaining a particular social system, nor its function in adapting a society to a political/ecological niche. Rather the development of death enmity was seen as resulting from a sociocultural system in transition. Death enmity in Thull, I argued, can best be understood as the result of two interrelated changes: first, a change from a classic system of alliance in which marriage connected sets of exogamous lineages to a system in which concepts of honor, the seclusion of women, and the value of endogamous marriage organized social relationships; and second, the change from a subsistence system based on balanced herding and cultivation to an economic system built on cash crop agriculture. The key to understanding why these transitions generated *dushmani* lies in grasping the consequence of particular changes that were a part of the larger transition. Changes in the cultural construction of self effected by changes in religious ideology instigated new configurations of passions and actions comprising revenge emotions. These changes, in conjunction with the ownership of modern firearms made possible by economic development, created a context encouraging—and perhaps even requiring—the creation of organized vengeance within the community.

notes

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¹Research in Pakistan was carried out from February to November, 1984.

²*Kohistani* is a Persian word meaning "mountain dweller." As such it is used to refer to the non-Pakhtun inhabitants of the eastern Hindu-Kush and Karakorum, which today includes peoples living in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. As used here it refers only to the non-Pakhtun inhabitants dwelling in the mountains in the north of Dir and Swat districts.

³Police posts were not established in Dir Kohistan until sometime after 1965, and unfortunately no records exist that can verify an increase in murder rates since the time of Barth's research. The head of police in Thull reported to me that in the last few years an average of two murders a month have occurred. Of the four cases of *dushmani* for which I was able to gather fairly detailed information, all stem from murders committed in the last five years. The most celebrated series of murders during my stay in Thull resulted from a fight with spades (in which there were no fatalities) that had taken place about 12 years ago. The first murder in the series, however, did not occur until the summer of 1983.

⁴Emotions are commonly thought of in this way in anthropological writing; Rosaldo's *Knowledge and Passion* (1980) is an obvious example.

⁵See, for example, Robertson 1896; Strand 1974; Jones 1974; Darling 1971.

⁶In describing the communities of neighboring Indus Kohistan in the mid-19th century, Biddulph writes that "Blood feuds are not permitted to last for an indefinite period, as amongst the Afghans, and after a time the parties are brought together and made to swear peace on the Koran" (1971[1880]:17-18). It is likely that vengeance was treated in a similar manner in Dir/Swat Kohistan.

⁷In 1852, one such expedition led by Sir Colin Campbell burned 12 villages, killing many of their inhabitants and destroying much property.

⁸The events in Dir, Swat, and Bajour are reported in fascinating detail by McMahon and Ramsay, British political agents in the area at the end of the 19th century. Their account is contained in *Report on the Tribes of Dir, Swat, and Bajour* (1981[1901]).

⁹It is not uncommon to see Kohistanis watching reruns of "Kojak" and "Trapper John, M.D." in the restaurant of the Al Shalimar Hotel in Dir town.

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